

WANDERERS SAVED BY HOLIFIELD

WHEN Malcolm Crissell took advantage of one of Wycombe Wanderers' few mistakes in the 73rd minute of Saturday's Rothmans Isthmian League encounter, it seemed the champions would have nothing to show for dominating almost 80 minutes of the match. Then, with literally seconds remaining, Mick Holifield broke through to earn his side a richly deserved share of the points.

So often this season we have seen Wycombe totally in command of games and yet only just clinching the verdict. Once again on Saturday their only flaw was in front of goal where they carved out a prodigious amount of scoring chances and yet took only one.

A four or five goal margin would not have been out of place if even HALF their opportunities had been taken. But had they lost, the Blues would have had few arguments. The cold fact is they are just not scoring enough goals.

With the Division One leaders all involved in the London Senior Cup, Wycombe had a great opportunity to go two points clear of Ilford and five ahead of Leatherhead. Now they occupy second place merely on goal average.

Although Barking have made several improvements to their two-year-old ground at Mayesbrook Park, including spending £700 on re-seeding, their pitch still leaves a lot to be desired. The bumpy surface had a good deal to do with Wanderers' frustration and yet they looked a good enough side to overcome these problems.

Dave Alexander, who received his permit from the F.A. late in the week, came on as substitute in the second half for his first league match. Having played for Lincoln City, Dave is Wycombe's first "permit player". He was one of the two changes in the usual line-up, the 'flu affected Terry Reardon making way for Graham Mackenzie.

In the first few minutes of the match, Barking's tall back four looked a formidable barrier for the visiting strikers but as the game progressed the centre backs struggled more and more in a strong wind.

Barking 1, Wycombe Wanderers 1 Report by STUART EARP

Wanderers took their time to get going and it was not until the 12th minute that they really threatened when Howard Kennedy sliced a shot wide after a neat build-up between Holifield and Keith Searle. Then, with 15 minutes gone, the Blues met their first piece of ill luck.

Tony Horseman twice found himself clear of the defence and on the second occasion Joe Fascione, Barking's ex-Chelsea player — handled just outside the area. It was an ideal chance for a Horseman "bender" and Tony duly obliged. Goalkeeper Paul Kitson could only watch as the ball curled around the defensive wall and thudded against his left hand upright. The posts at Barking are square and it would have been interesting to see what would have happened had they been round. As it was, the ball came straight out and was hastily cleared.

Far from being despondent after their early luck, Wanderers maintained a steady assault on the home net. Kitson saved at the feet of Steve Perrin and then Horseman crashed in a left-foot effort from long range just past the post.

Barking did have their moments in attack like in the 23rd minute when Chris Moore shot over the top and Crissell, their top scorer, saw a drive well saved by John Maskell, but the half ended with Wycombe firmly in the driving seat.

Facing the breeze in the second period, I expected Wycombe to struggle, but they won themselves so much possession they maintained steady pressure on the home side. With

the ball holding up in the wind, Norcott and Waite both had difficulty in timing their headers and were grateful for the covering of the full backs on more than one occasion.

The Blues began the half with a bang. Only 60 seconds had transpired when Horseman latched onto a Searle pass inside the area but Norcott raced across to tackle in the nick of time.

That incident was just the start of a series of chances Wanderers created for themselves in the second half. With the defence looking sound enough, and midfield working busily they gave the Barking defence a real grilling.

Perrin ballooned the ball high over the top from one of Keith Mead's well placed free kicks and in the 59th minute Whettall robbed Searle of a free header after Holifield outran the defence and crossed perfectly. Two minutes later yet another chance came their way when the home centre backs got in a tangle, but this time Searle mis-cued his shot.

Barking, penned in their own half, were restricted to the occasional breakaway and once or twice caught the Blues' defence square. Thanks to Gary Hand's covering, however, any danger was usually averted.

Perrin, who gave a much improved performance, had one close range effort brilliantly parried into the side netting by Kitson and soon afterwards Alexander came on for Mackenzie. "Jock" must have felt a little hard done by for he was just getting acclimatised and was replaced at a time when Wanderers were going really well. His replacement worked hard but had little time to show his full potential.

It was soon after the switch that Barking broke clear to snatch the lead with only their third attack of the half. Mead, who had an otherwise impeccable game, missed an attempted clearance as the ball bounced unpredictably and Crissell was on hand to slot past the helpless John Maskell. It was a killing blow to Wycombe who had done everything but score.

Credit must be given, however, to the way Wanderers came back. Immediately after the goal Holifield put Perrin through. Steve beat Kitson and rolled the ball forward towards the net for what looked like a certain equaliser. Searle must have thought so too, for instead of making certain, he just watched the ball roll slowly past the post.

Mead, up with the attack, then drove just wide with only two minutes left and as the seconds ticked away, it seemed Wycombe were destined for their third defeat of the season.

But with just seconds left, Wanderers mounted one more attack. Holifield and Searle exchanged passes and split the home defence wide open again. Holifield ran on and to the delight of the supporters, planted the ball past Kitson for a dramatic equaliser. Justice was done at last.

BARKING: P. Kitson; L. Joughin, K. Norcott, D. Waite, P. Whettall; G. Walters, J. Fascione, K. Varney; M. Crissell, P. Burton, C. Moore. Sub. R. Americas (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand; G. Mackenzie (sub. D. Alexander 68 mins.), H. Kennedy, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin.

Referee: R. Barker.
Halftime: 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Holifield (90), Barking — Crissell (73).